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Make a cozy quilt

PAGE 33 The new farmhouse kitchen

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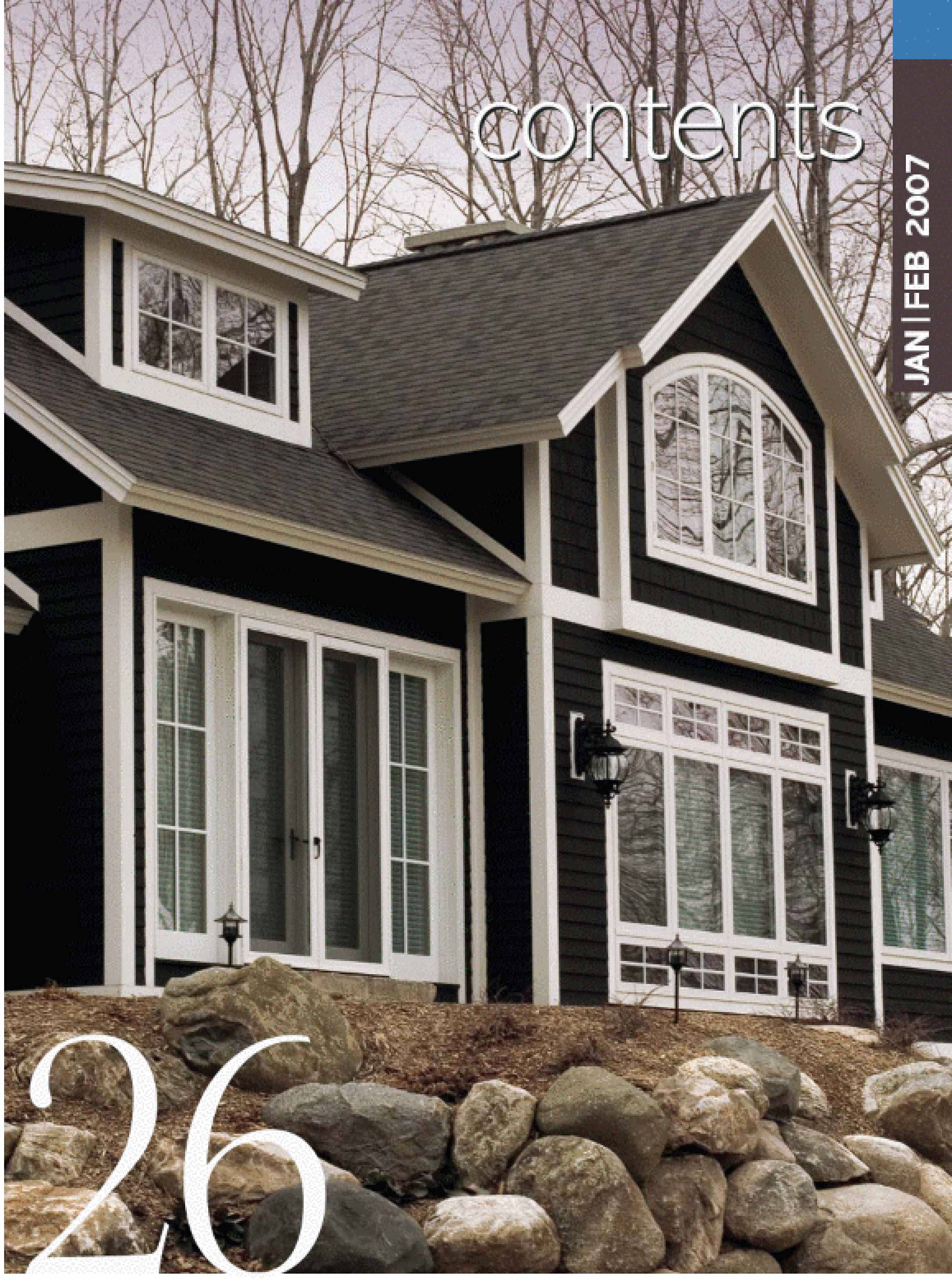

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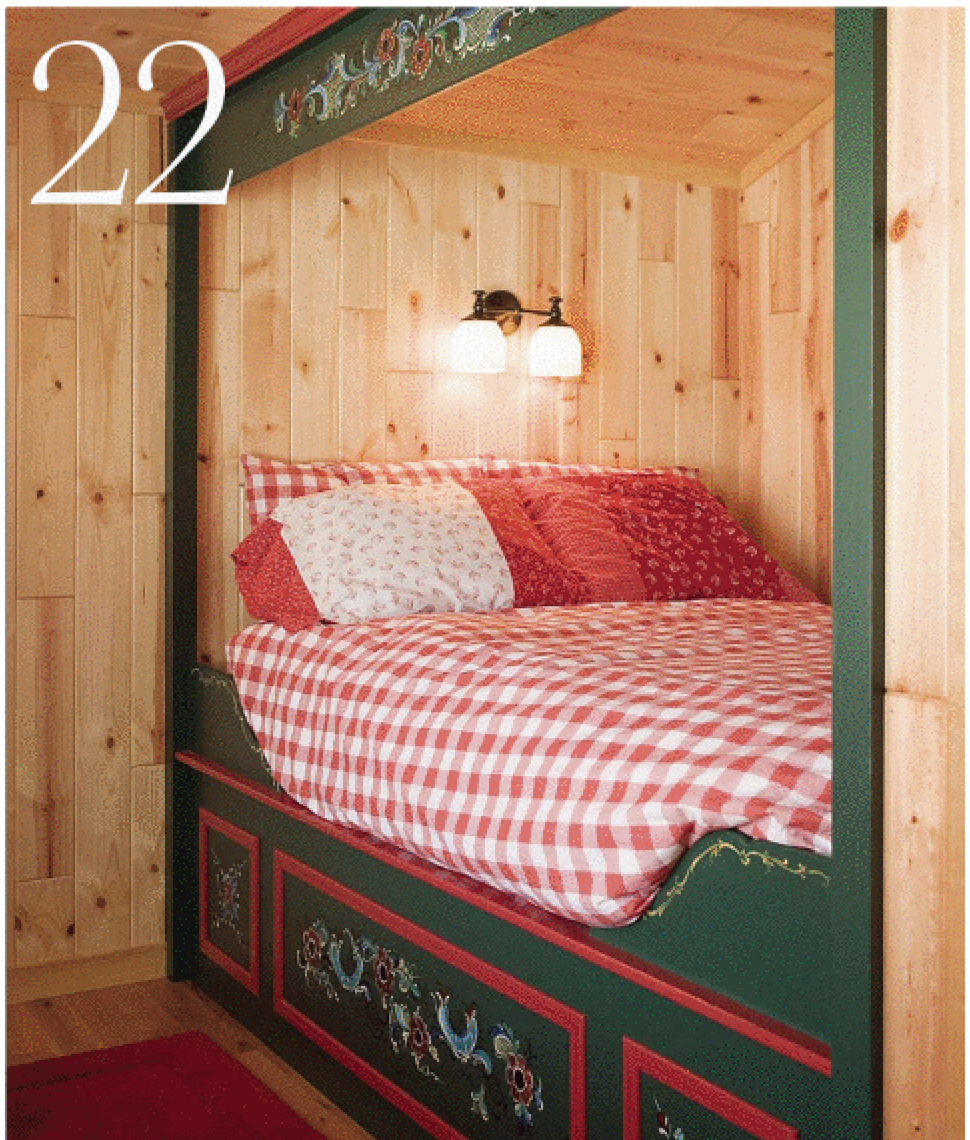

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EDITOR	Jeff Smith
MANAGING EDITOR	Elizabeth T. Edwards
ASSOCIATE EDITOR	Emily Betz Tyra
ASSISTANT EDITOR	Lynda Twardowski
CONTRIBUTORS	Janet Lively Patty LaNoue Stearns Lori Hall Steele
ART DIRECTOR	Diane Sundling Kolak
PRODUCTION DIRECTOR	Theresa Burau-Baehr
ART ASSOCIATES	Bethany Kucera Kelly Nogoski
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Editorial & Advertising Offices
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Phone: 231-941-8174 Fax: 231-941-8391
Email: x2k9g@traversemagazine.com

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MEMBER city and regional magazines

The right to a well-designed kitchen

THE NEW FLOOR PLAN LET ME JOIN THE WORLD *outside the kitchen.*

PHOTO: ISTOCK.

Most folks count the 19th Amendment to the Constitution, which guarantees women the right to vote, *the* major benchmark of female emancipation in the United States. I'd throw in another one to round out the discussion: the first time a kitchen designer set up shop.

I came to that conclusion back in the 1980's when I was a stay-at-home mom with two little girls. Our kitchen then, in the house we still live in, was sealed off from the living and dining areas by a load-bearing wall. The wall and the burrowlike cupboards that sucked pie pans and food processor parts into a black hole were products, I'm fairly certain, of the guys who built the house back in the early 1960's. Guys whose workmanship reflected their Northwoods characters: solid, honest, strong. But guys, nevertheless, whose only real understanding of the way a kitchen worked was gained at deer camp.

One day in frustration—it may have been after my toddler laid her rag doll to bed atop the hot woodstove just steps from where I was in the kitchen, but on the other side of that wall—I called a carpenter to come with a sledgehammer. The empty space he made that day was glorious (and I didn't even mind the header that every guy who'd looked at the project had warned me about). The new floor plan emancipated me. It let me join the world outside the kitchen yet still allowed me to make sure everyone ate. It also freed up my family and friends to join in the cooking while conversation and ideas flowed.

Of course, the simple act of removing a wall is primitive compared to the high art of contemporary kitchen design. In this issue we introduce you to some of Northern Michigan's hottest designers *(see ProFile, page 11, A Small Luxury, page 28 and Pulling it Together, page 33)* and the products they love. As you'll see, good designers don't just liberate home cooks—who, nowadays, are just as likely to be guys—they transform the entire cooking process into the pursuit of happiness.

Elizabeth Edwards is managing editor of Northern Home & Cottage.

LISSA@TRAVERSEMAGAZINE.COM

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This January issue is interactive, and we're more excited than ever about it. With one click we link you to the shops and suppliers mentioned in this issue—and lead you to a wealth of extra editorial info. Click on **www.northernhomeandcottage.com.** Talk about convenient!

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NORTHERN style

Toasty hues and cool designs.

BY **LYNDA TWARDOWSKI**

TOUCH OF *glass*

This winter, pay a visit to Jordan Valley Glassworks. Watch the fireside show—artisans Glenna Haney and Jay Bavers blowing molten glass into kaleidoscope-color vases, lighting fixtures and bowls—then take home a showpiece. BOWL SHOWN HERE, $285. EAST JORDAN. 231-536-0539, WWW.JORDANVALLEYGLASSWORKS.COM.

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PHOTO: TODD ZAWISTOWSKI.

BATTER UP: Sweet and Easy Orange-Zest Crêpes

The art of making crêpes need not be complicated or necessitate a fancy crêpe-making pan or appliance. All you need to impress your breakfast guests is a nonstick pan—used only for crêpe making—and this no-fail recipe:

- 2 large eggs
- ¾ cup milk
- ½ cup water
- 1 cup flour
- 3 tablespoons melted butter
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 2 tablespoons Grand Marnier
- Butter, for coating pan

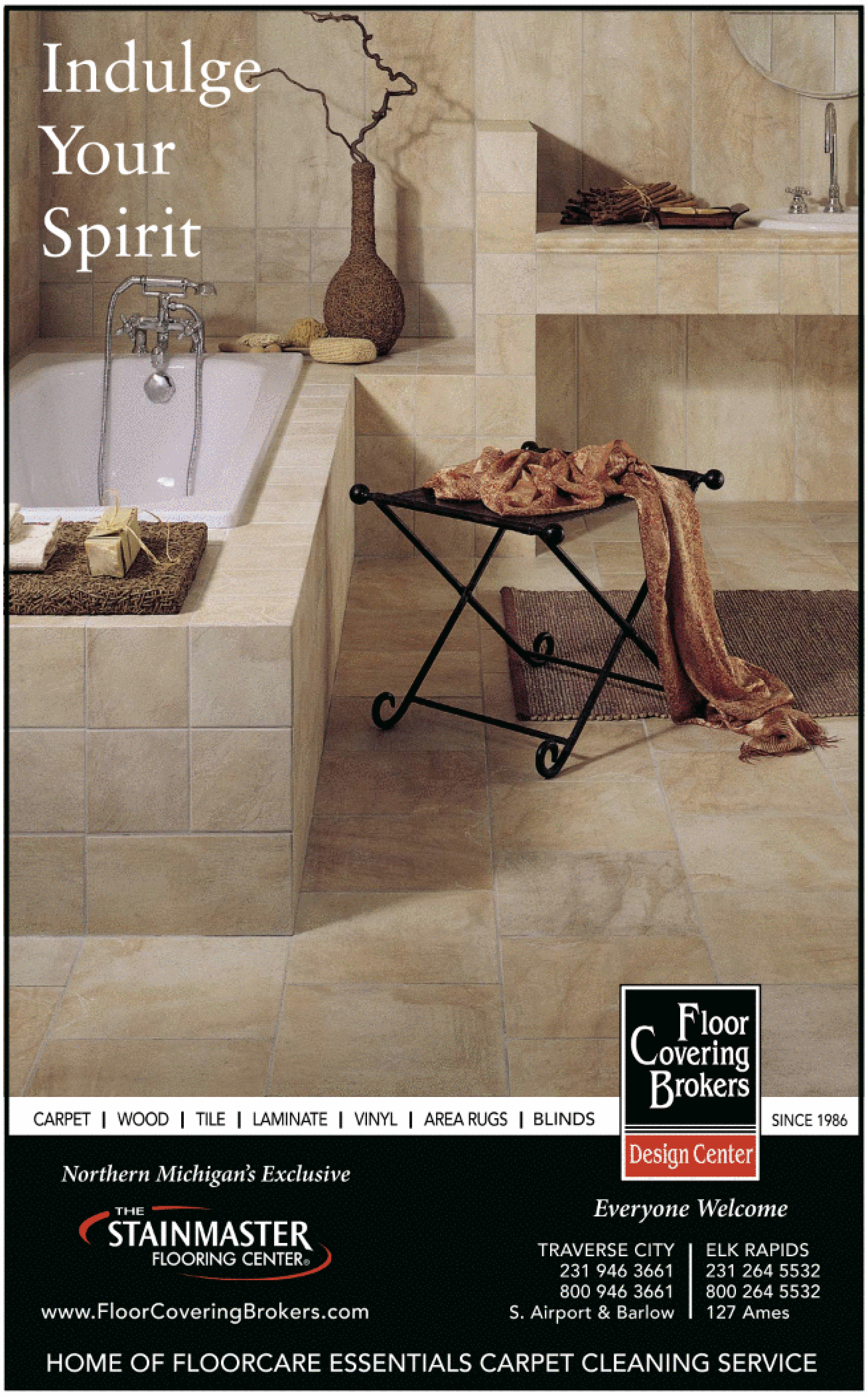
Orange Zest Butter

- 2 oranges—one zested, one thinly sliced
- 1 cup butter, softened
- 4 tablespoons sugar
- Powdered sugar, for topping

Combine first eight ingredients in blender, pulsing for 10 seconds. Set the batter in the refrigerator for at least one hour to reduce air bubbles, which can cause the crêpe to tear during cooking. (Batter will keep in fridge up to 48 hours.)

While batter chills, combine orange zest, 1 cup butter and sugar for topping. Set aside.

Heat a 10-inch nonstick pan on medium heat. Coat pan bottom with butter. Pour 1 ounce of batter into the pan and tilt pan to spread batter thinly and evenly. Cook to desired doneness, then remove to plate. Fold each crêpe. Sprinkle with powdered sugar, top with orange slice. Serve with orange-zest butter.—L.T.



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NORTHERN style

The Pro File: Sara Busby, Kitchen Designer

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www.sarabusbydesign.com

Northern Michigan kitchen designer Sara Busby is the 2007 president-elect of the National Kitchen and Bath Association based in New Jersey. The position means that she will become president of the association in 2008. Busby will juggle her new responsibilities while managing her company, Sara Busby Design—where she combines her background in architectural design with her passion for kitchens.

Tell me about your design philosophy. A kitchen should reflect the lifestyle of the clients. Somebody better not walk in and say, "Sara Busby designed this." They'd better say, "This looks like you."

Where do you get the inspiration for your designs? We have such beautiful locations up here, so the natural environment inspires me. It might be pulling the color out of the maple leaves in the yard or from the color of the water.

How do you customize designs to fit your client's lifestyle? We talk about how they live in the kitchen. If they want a social space, we'll probably put in wider aisles where people can stand and talk. If they're serious cooks, we'll put in a lot of workstations and maybe a low counter so kids can help out with the cooking.

Does remodeling a kitchen improve the value of a home? National statistics say you can get a rate of return anywhere from 95 to 120 percent on kitchen remodels. There are studies that show a remodeled kitchen not only gets a better return, but it helps a house sell faster.—KATIE HOLLAND

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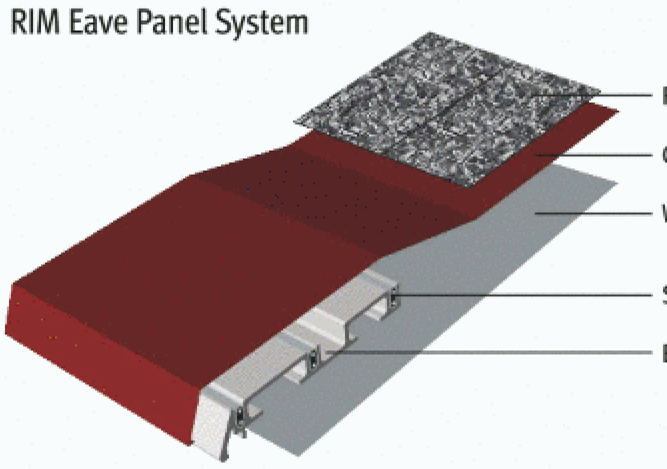

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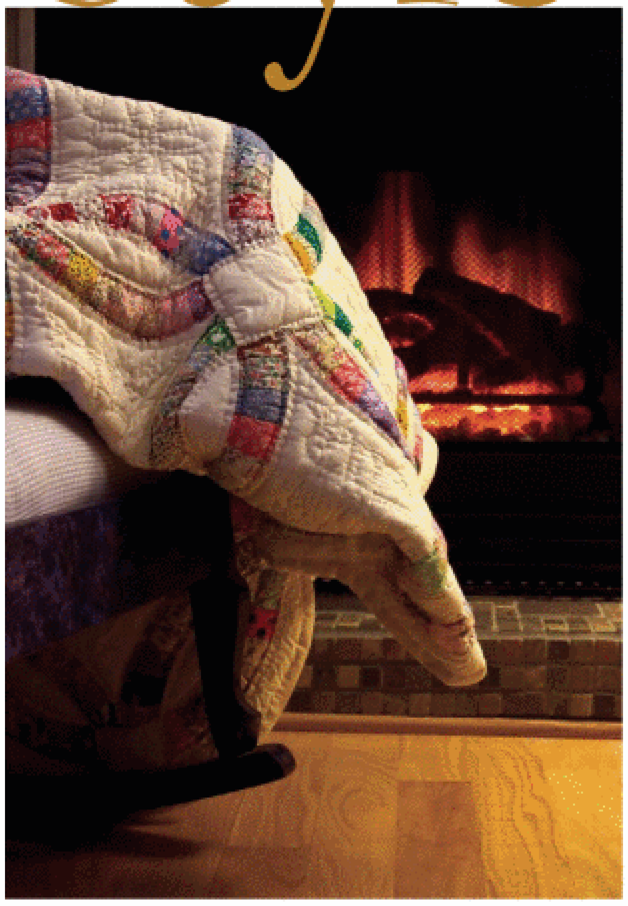

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WINTER CRAFT:
Cozy up to a quilt class

The best excuse we know to spend a dozen winter days curled up under a quilt is to spend those days making one. Think about it: You can lounge and be productive all at once. Whether you're a newbie or longtime member of a quilting bee, you'll find dozens of cozy classes at Northern quilt shops like these:

Bellaire: Cousin's Quilt Shop, 222 N. Bridge Street, 231-533-4661

Beulah: Quilts by the Lake, 194 S. Benzie Boulevard, 231-882-4024

Cedar: Liberty Quilt Shop, 9027 Kasson, 231-228-6689

East Jordan: The Quilt Cottage, 301 Water Street, 231-536-3363, www.thequiltcottage.net

Grayling: The Icehouse Quilt Shop, 509 Norway Street, 989-348-4821, www.theicehouse quiltshop.com

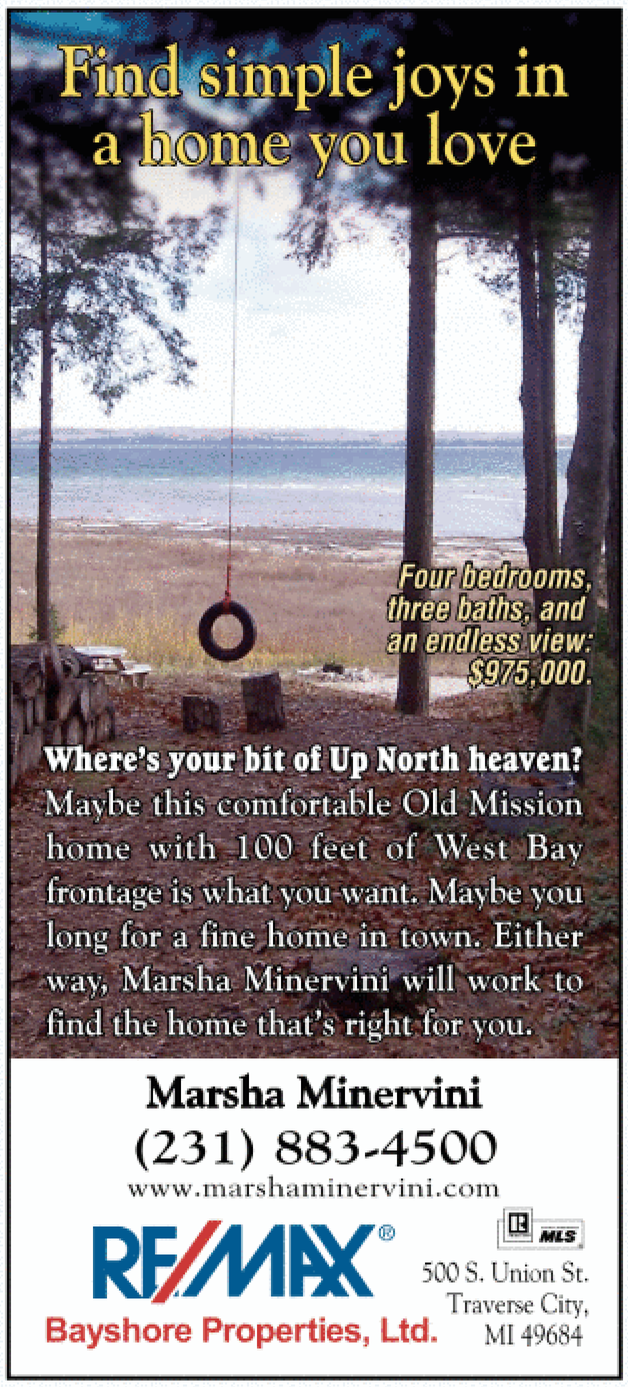
Lewiston: Pine Tree Quilt Shoppe, 3060 Kneeland Street, 989-786-2804, www.pinetreequilt shoppe.com

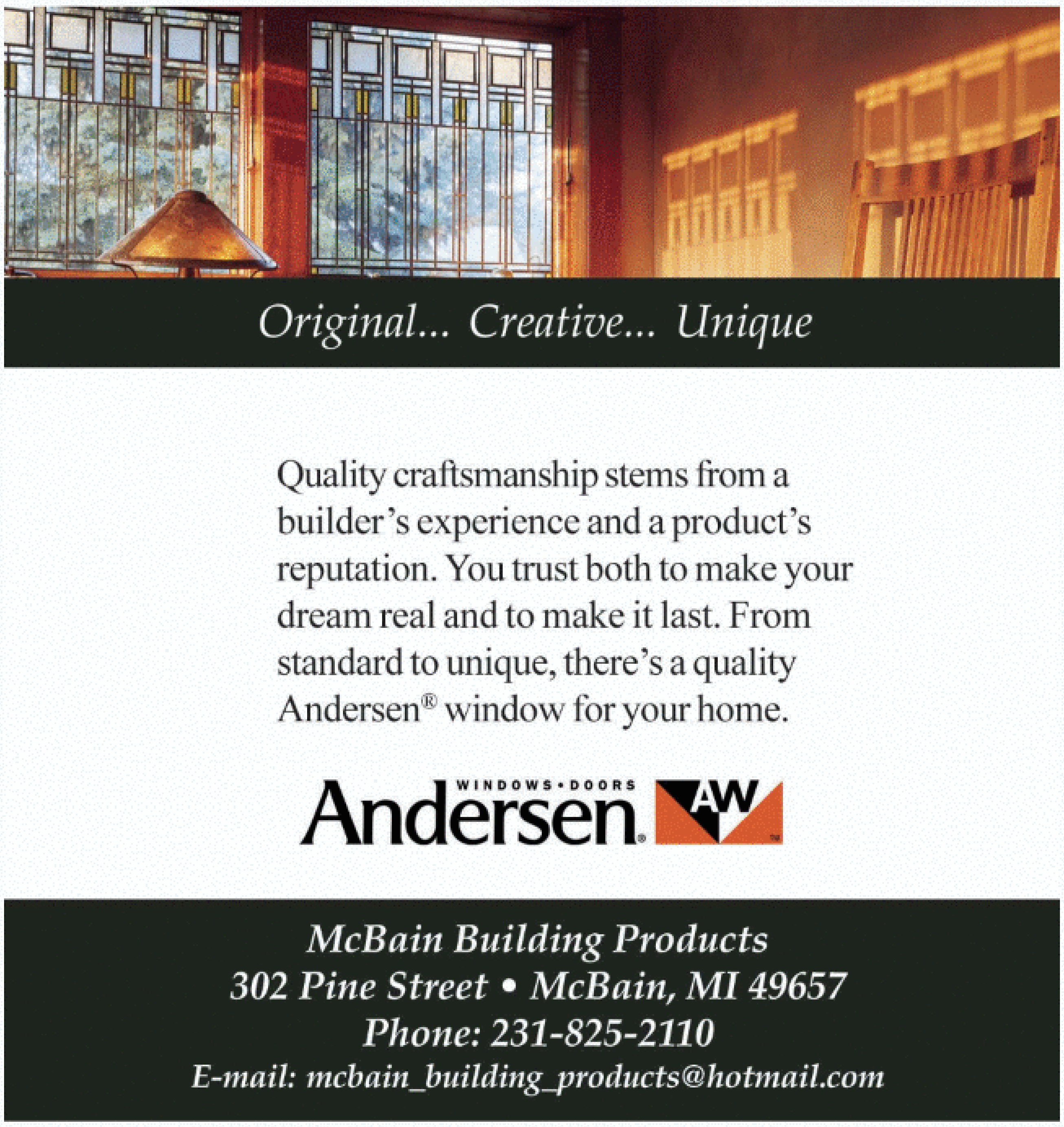
Petoskey: Calico Crafts, 1691 U.S. 131 South, 231-347-1511

Traverse City: Quilt-n-Bee, 425-C South Airport Road, 231-922-6766 or www.quiltnbee.com

Traverse City: Material Girl Quilt Shop, 956 South Airport Road, 231-933-4060

Williamsburg: Renee's House of Quilting, 8995 M 72 East, 231-267-5895





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Yarn as still life

Warm up winter decor with custom-wound balls of yarn.

Whether you knit or not, you can still pile balls of gorgeous yarn in a basket to enrich a room with sophisticated and surprising colors and textures.

Choose your fiber palette at a yarn shop and wind as many as five strands into one multi-hued, multi-textured ball. Some yarn shops will do the winding for you for a fee, or even free if you buy their yarn.

To wind the balls yourself you'll need a yarn ball winder, a simple gadget that is available at craft stores or on the Internet for less than $50. Simply attach the winder to a table. Attach the ends of the pull skeins (the tidy bundles that most yarn comes in) to the winder and wind.

If you want to blend a hank (old-styled coiled bundles) of yarn into your decorative ball, you'll need to ask a pal for help. Place the hank around your helper's arms, take the end of the yarn and roll the hank into a ball. (Yarn shops use another gadget called a swift to roll hanks into balls.) Attach the end of the ball to the yarn ball winder as you would a pull skein. —E.E.

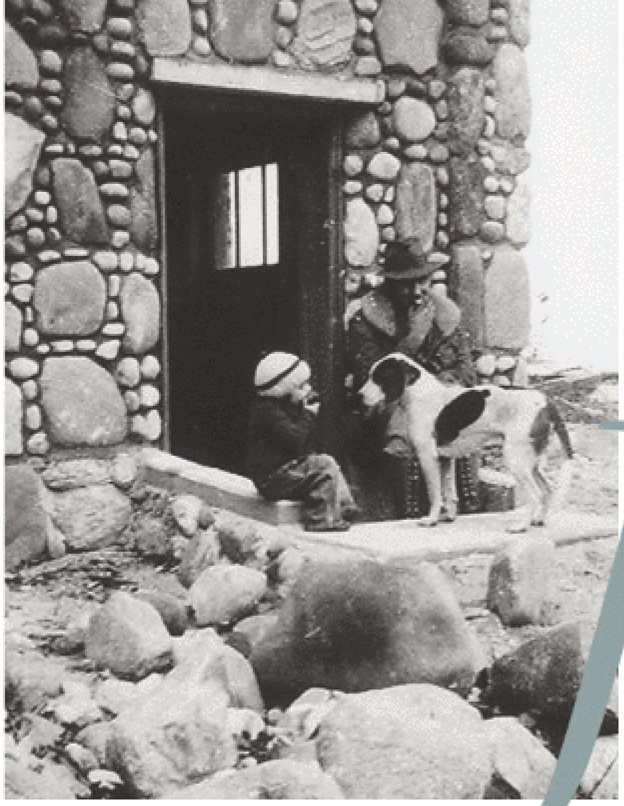
Inspired by three years in Norway, Jennie Schultz had the original dining room set painted in the style of Scandinavian antiques. **OPPOSITE:** A pewter tea service and heirloom chair are among Jennie's favorite pieces. A sign from the old resort hangs in the remodeled basement.

Living in The Michigonian

AN OLD STONE HOUSE ON TORCH LAKE REPAYS A THOUGHTFUL RESTORATION WITH TALES AND TREASURES TO SHARE.

TEXT BY **JANET LIVELY**

PHOTOGRAPHS BY **TODD ZAWISTOWSKI**



Set in Stone

The Michigonian is one of a half-dozen structures around Torch Lake built with walls displaying the "hens and chicks" pattern—flat stones as large as three feet across surrounded by much smaller rocks. Stone houses were popular in the area because of the abundance of colorful rock on the ground. Williamsburg mason Pat Coy replaced some stone on the roadside entrance and repaired the lake-front steps. Other than that, the walls of the old inn are so solid they haven't been patched in 70 years. Coy says they're due for attention now, but with a little mortar they'll stand firm another 50 years.

For years on their Torch Lake vacations, Dave and Jennie Schultz had admired a stone Depression Era structure just down the road from where they stayed. Although they didn't know much about the seven-bedroom house, they snapped it up—along with an adjacent guest cottage—as soon as it went on the market in 1987.

The Schultzes knew that they were in for a home improvement challenge. Neighbors had told them that the seller, a single gentleman, had touched virtually nothing in 20 years. Stepping into the big house was like traveling to the days before he owned it, when the building known as The Michigonian was a popular tourist resort.

Metal numbers still hung on the bedroom doors. The rooms had original light fixtures and vintage furniture. A large set of dishes, for inn guests, was stored in the basement along with a sign advertising the resort. Chests of drawers held other treasures: old stationery and little gold tags that read "Souvenir of The Michigonian."

Jennie was determined to learn more of the resort's history, so she looked up Mrs. W.T. Stevens, who had built the place with her husband in 1936. Mrs. Stevens, then in her 90's and living on her own in Mancelona, was happy to tell her story and accepted an invitation to visit her former home. But by the time she made it, the Schultzes had completed a big remodeling project, doubling the size of the tiny kitchen by expanding into what had been a workroom and opening the wall to the dining area.

Mrs. Stevens approved of the changes. Her memories of maneuvering about the cramped kitchen cooking three meals a day for as many as 20 guests were not necessarily fond. "When she walked in the door, she said, 'All I can think of is work,'" Jennie recalls.

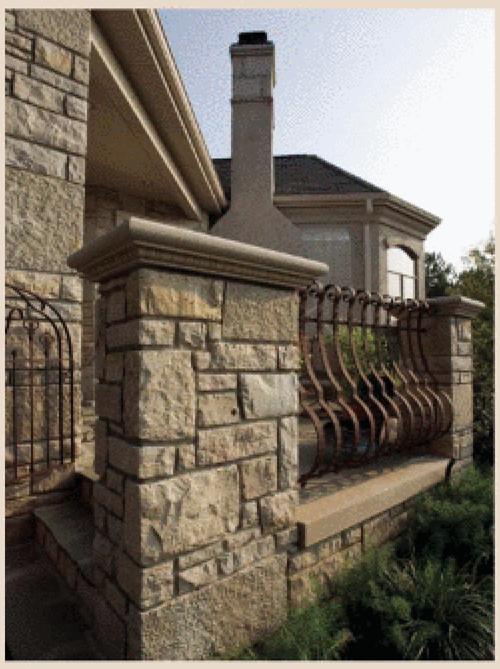
Reopening The Michigonian as a bed and breakfast didn't interest the Schultzes. Dave's consulting business took them away for long periods, and when they were home, they were busy working on the house. Dave, a talented woodworker with a professional-grade shop, did much of the work himself, including refinishing the wood floors and converting the basement garage into a family room.

The earliest round of projects involved winterizing. Although the 18-inch-thick walls provide excellent insulation, "you could see your breath" the first winter they lived there because the original windows and door were so leaky, Jennie says. Most of the old windows were standard-sized and could be swapped for off-the-shelf replacements. But the windows for the lakeside porch, which had had only screens, needed to be custom-made to fit inside the openings in the unforgiving stone walls.

The old fuel-oil furnace also had to be replaced, and the Schultzes chose hot water heat, in large part because it was less

OPPOSITE: Dave made the bench, Jennie made the pancakes, and they both made the maple syrup that welcomes visitors to their remodeled kitchen. **TOP:** Diane Thompson (then Stevens) was a young girl when construction wrapped up on her parents' resort. **LEFT:** The kitchen window seat is a cozy spot to flip through cookbooks and enjoy a cup of tea.

Stepping into the big house was like traveling to the days when the building was known as *The Michigonian,* a popular tourist resort.



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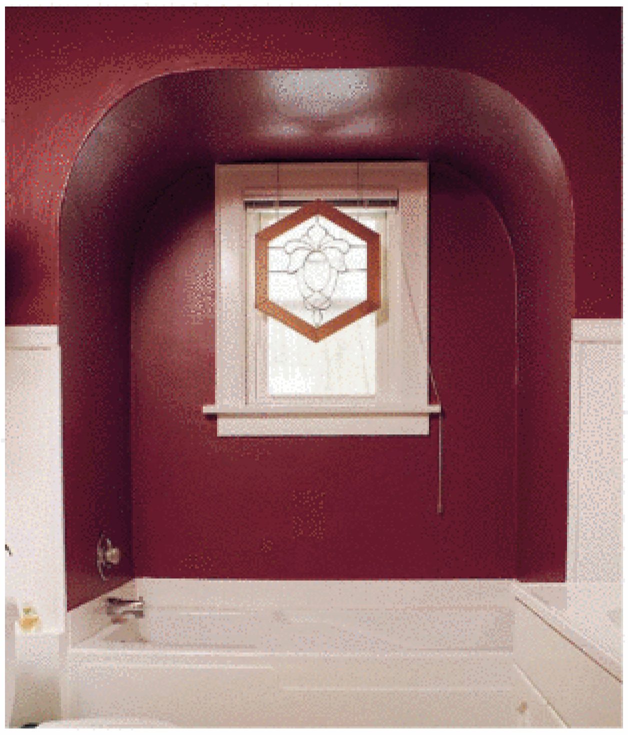
WALKS IN THE WOODS: Mostly in their own "back 40" but also Coy Mountain Natural Area just outside Alden.

SMALL-TOWN SHOPPING: The Schultzes can't say enough about the helpful merchants in Alden, including the folks at Spencer Creek Trading Co. 231-331-4845 and The Alden Store Co. 231-331-6811. (Both stores open from spring through January 1).



This main floor bedroom and bath, plus another bedroom not shown, were the living quarters for the Michigonian's original owners. The colorful stones in the walls may have come from the lot where the house sits.

invasive than a forced-air, ductwork system. They determined from the start to preserve as much of the original plaster walls as possible. Even though they hired a contractor to remove several interior walls and open up the main floor, the Schultzes were careful to keep the plaster-covered arches that characterize 1930's design.

Now retired, the couple is well settled into life in the stone house, running their own maple syrup operation in the winter and entertaining so much company in the summer that Jennie jokes that she's gained a new appreciation for the hardworking Mrs. Stevens.

Mrs. Stevens died some years ago, but the Schultzes have since befriended her daughter, Diane Thompson of Beulah. On one of her visits, Thompson brought a keepsake that she felt belonged back in the house—the shiny percolator that Mrs. Stevens regularly used to serve her guests. Jennie keeps the coffee pot on display. "It's part of the history here," she says.

Janet Lively is a contributor to Northern Home & Cottage. JSLIVELY@PEOPLEPC.COM

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NORWEGIAN FOLK

Vibrant colors and authentic Nordic style create a warm welcome in this traditional guesthouse.

When young Madelyn, Maggie and Mabel Yount visit their grandparents, Jay and Kathie Price, they see a blonde-tressed princess riding a great white bear, a little old man asleep in a horn, a troll awaiting passersby, and a golden castle hovering on the horizon. The scenes, lifted from Norwegian folk tales, are painted on the kitchen cupboards in their grandparents' guesthouse in Lake City, a small town in Missaukee County's pine-covered countryside.

TEXT BY **ELIZABETH EDWARDS**

PHOTOGRAPHS BY **BRIAN CONFER**

OPPOSITE: The stabbur kitchen with its fairytale kitchen cabinets. The dishes are Norwegian Porsgrund Porcelain in the Nisse (gnome) pattern. **ABOVE, FROM LEFT:** Maggie, Madelyn and Mabel Yount. The front of the stabbur—as it looks from the Prices' back door.

The small, two-story building is designed to look like a stabbur, the traditional Norwegian outbuilding used for a pantry and sometimes as quarters for overflow guests. The Prices' stabbur is as authentic as they could make it, right down to the built-in beds decorated with the Norwegian folk art of rosemaling (translation: flower painting). The couple's fascination with Nordic culture is a family matter—in the 19th century Kathie's Danish and Norwegian ancestors settled in the village of Lucas, 10 miles from Lake City. When the Prices were planning to build a guesthouse several years ago, they decided they'd try to replicate a stabbur. "We thought how cool to just pick up on this unique Norwegian building and adapt it a little bit and make it a little larger," Jay says.

Just before Christmas in 2004 the Prices toured Norway, taking note along the way of any stabburs they saw. They were even invited to a Norwegian family's home for lunch—an occasion that included a peek inside the stabbur. The Prices returned from Norway infatuated with the country's snowy landscape and the way Norwegians light up their dark, Nordic nights with twinkling white lights outside and lively colors inside. They were more determined than ever to make their stabbur as authentic as they could.

THE PRICES RETURNED FROM NORWAY

INFATUATED WITH THE COUNTRY.

OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Artist Tove Ness's interpretation, inspired by an old Norwegian folk tale, of the princess astride the great white bear. One of the stabbur's five built-in beds—the guesthouse can sleep eight comfortably. Ness's designs are freehand, and she doesn't wait until one color is dry before applying another.

Two years later, the two-story log building is tucked at the edge of the pines in the Price backyard. Three cantilevered sides—called galleries—on the upper story lend the structure the signature top-heavy stabbur shape. A Norwegian flag flies next to the front door, and a matched pair of wood cutouts of dragon heads threaten away evil spirits from their mounts on the front and back gables.

FIND HOME & COTTAGE RESOURCES FOR THE PRICE HOME ON PAGE 45.

The Prices did make some concessions to practicality. The exterior is half-log over a stick-built frame, not the traditional Norwegian full log *laft*. They also weren't able to find a stain as dark as the creosote color of traditional *laft* stabburs. And while they'd originally wanted red-clad windows similar to ones they'd seen in Norway, the price of custom-clad

windows made them reconsider. Andersen stock, green-clad casement windows proved the perfect solution. Paired with red-painted trim, they speak Norwegian just fine—an accent that gets even more fluent on the building's inside, thanks to a visit by Tove Ness, a Norwegian who specializes in the traditional folk art of rosemaling.

Norwegians use the art lavishly—covering dishes and doors, cupboards and furniture with the swirling, colorful floras. Although the folk painting dates to the 17th century, Price found out about Ness the modern way: on Google.

After discovering Ness's Web site, the Prices purchased some of her pieces by mail. They liked them so much that they invited Ness to come to Michigan and rosemal their stabbur. Her visit a year ago turned into something of a cultural exchange. Among other jaunts, the Prices took Ness shopping in Cadillac and to a home-cooking eatery in Falmouth, which, because it was hunting season, was jammed with hunters clad in their neon orange. She liked both places.

In return, Ness left their stabbur covered in the vibrant blues, greens, yellows and reds of Norwegian folk art. And the special treat—especially for the three towheaded sisters who became her buddies while she was in the United States—those kitchen cupboards fit for little girls' dreams.

Elizabeth Edwards is managing editor of Northern Home & Cottage.
LISSA@TRAVERSEMAGAZINE.COM

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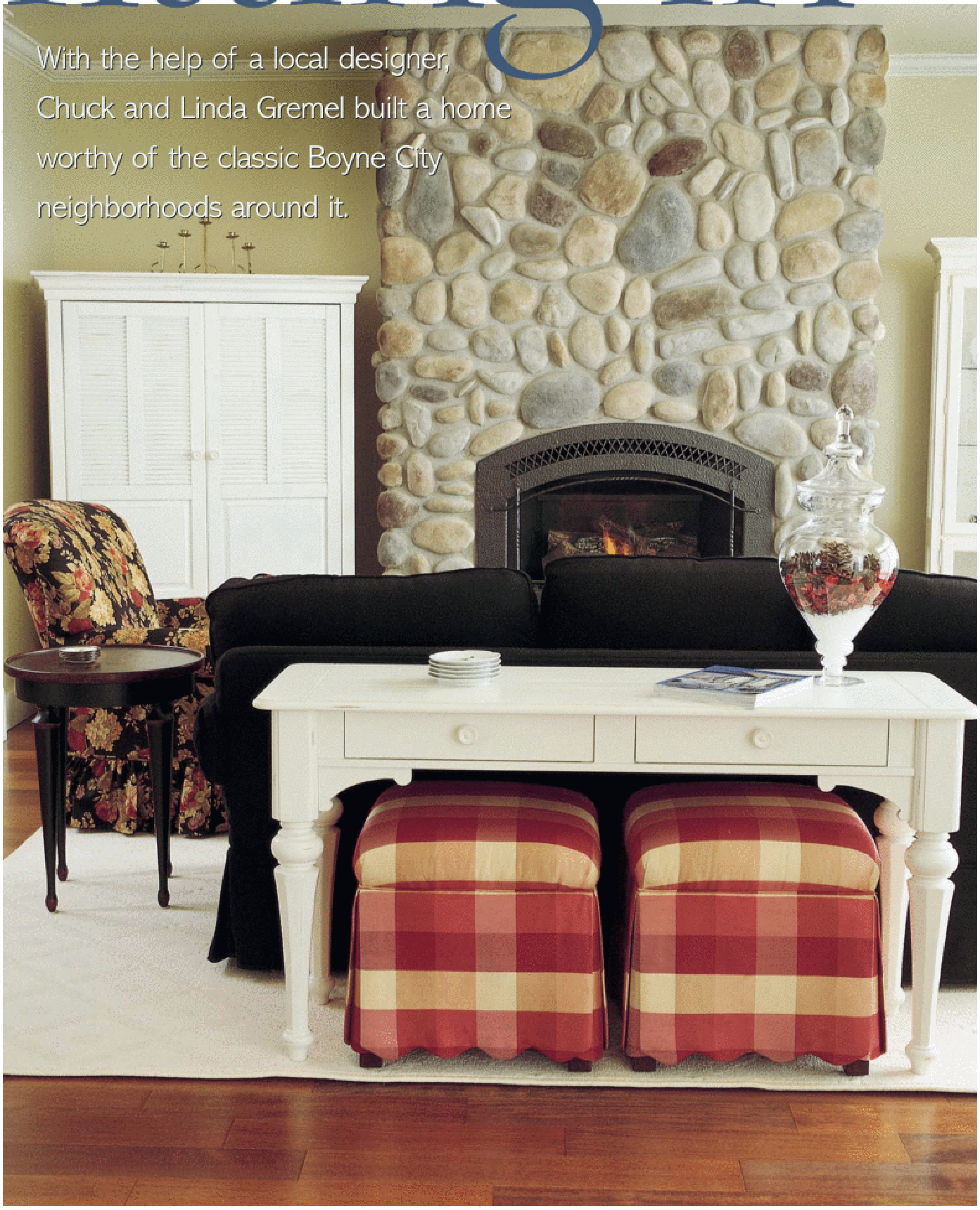
fitting in



With the help of a local designer, Chuck and Linda Gremel built a home worthy of the classic Boyne City neighborhoods around it.

TEXT BY **PATTY LANOUE STEARNS** PHOTOGRAPHS BY **TODD ZAWISTOWSKI**

A Small Luxury

The Gremels' 12-by-12-foot kitchen is an example of how a not-so-big kitchen can work like it is much larger—and why a kitchen designer is an important ingredient in any size project. The stylish efficiency in the Gremels' kitchen is thanks to Petoskey's Liz Firebaugh of Signature Kitchens. Among other accolades, Firebaugh is the recipient of the National Kitchen and Bath Association's 2005 Pinnacle of Design award.

The small kitchen doesn't lack for luxury. It features a tumbled-marble backsplash with fruit-motif inlaid copper tiles (pictured, below) and a cherry-wood island where guests can sit and talk while the meal is being prepared. An especially clever move by Firebaugh is that the upper portion of the island is high enough to hide the mess while people are sitting at the dining table. The vent hood mimics the window, and semi-custom white Decora cabinets, wood fronts on the appliances and a counter-depth refrigerator give a high-end look. The adjacent walk-in pantry, shut off from the kitchen with a pocket door, is great for quickly taking inventory of supplies on hand and keeping large appliances off the countertops and, as Firebaugh notes, it's inexpensive storage compared to cabinets.

Firebaugh's new 200-page hardbound book, ***Design with Taste***, can be ordered at www.signaturekitchensonline.com.—P.L.S.

Chuck and Linda Gremel found a gorgeous piece of land on a hilltop overlooking Lake Charlevoix in Boyne City, but for two years they wrestled with how and what to build on it. Chuck wanted a solid place with lots of angles, fine details and thick millwork. Linda wanted a toasty spot to relax, entertain and watch wildlife. And since their house on the hill would be visible, especially when the leaves are off the trees, they wanted it to fit into the classic Boyne City neighborhoods around it.

As it turned out, the very things that gave this setting its appeal—the height and shape of the lot—were just as problematic for building on it. After many months of wondering how to pull it off, the Gremels saw a home on Lake Charlevoix designed by Jodi Alger Lyons, an architectural designer who grew up in the area. When Chuck approached her with his ideas for his property, they clicked immediately.

Lyons' solution for the lot is a handsome three-story, cedar-clad house with white trim that she calls a Northern Michigan cottage with bungalow lines. She positioned the 2,400-square-foot home to capture all the natural light and views yet nestle into the terrain, none of which was changed for the build. "It was a very difficult lot," recalls Lyons. "The only way to make the driveway happen was to put the garage underneath the house."

Once inside the garage, the Gremels walk through a 9-foot river rock archway to the ground floor, which is outfitted with an exercise room, shower and laundry room. There is also an elevator to the next story, an amenity the Gremels added so the home will make it easier to "age in place"—a term used for homes that allow seniors to live independently despite disabilities.

For the time being, however, the stairs up to the second floor where they do most of their living still get plenty of use. On this main floor, the couple can marvel at the blue of Lake Charlevoix and the serenity of the surrounding woods through floor-to-

LEFT: The Gremels call this the "Peter Pan" guestroom, which offers a mellow bird's-eye view of the lake.

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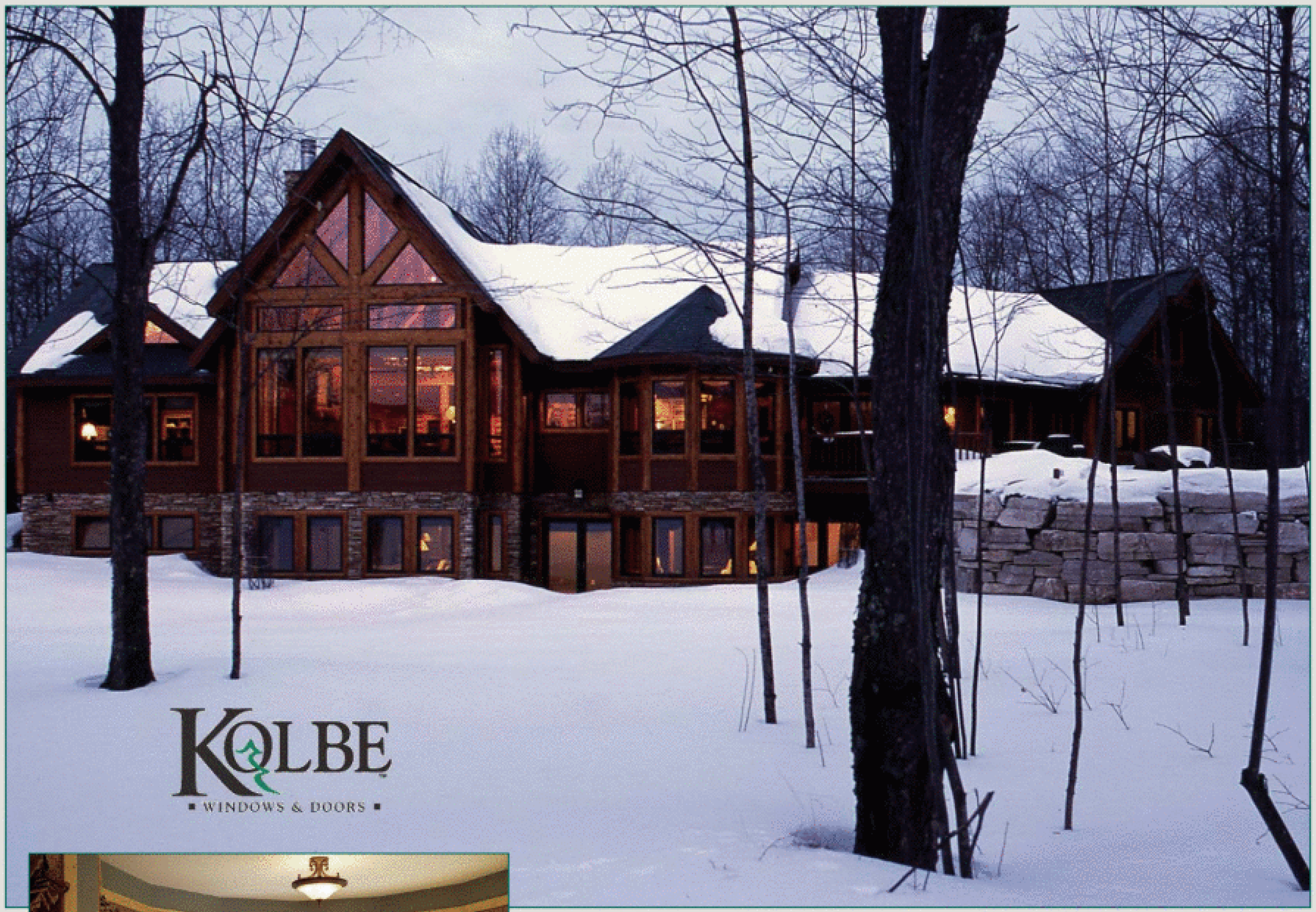

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WHEE: Tobogganing and ice skating with Linda's niece and nephew at Avalanche Mountain in Boyne City's Avalanche Preserve Recreation Area. Skate rentals, a warming room and graduated stairs to the top offer beautiful views, 231-582-6597.

RUMMAGING: Rita's Revente, a consignment shop in downtown Boyne City, 231-582-7540.

ceiling windows and doors. On chilly evenings they warm up in front of the river rock fireplace in the living room or relax in a pine-paneled den outfitted with French doors, velvety furniture and padded window seat.

Another set of stairs leads to the third floor, which can be sealed off with glass-paneled pocket doors for energy efficiency when not in use. This top floor is done up in a nautical theme (Chuck keeps his sailboat in Cheboygan's Duncan Bay) with beadboard paneling, vaulted ceilings, cozy nooks and built-in window seats. The centerpiece is a guestroom painted a striking midnight blue. It features built-in twin beds with shiplike storage underneath. In a house filled with places to look out over Boyne City and Lake Charlevoix, Linda especially loves this one.

ABOVE: Linda Gremel can sit in this inviting pine-paneled room and watch the wild turkeys, foxes and deer that wander the woods. **RIGHT:** The main floor glows with the warmth of 5-inch-wide planks of merbau wood. Columns define the wide-open dining area, and the beadboard and thick millwork throughout the Gremel home's three floors exude expert craftsmanship and classic grace.

Patty LaNoue Stearns is a regular contributor to Northern Home & Cottage.
PATTYLANOUESTEARNS@CHARTER.NET

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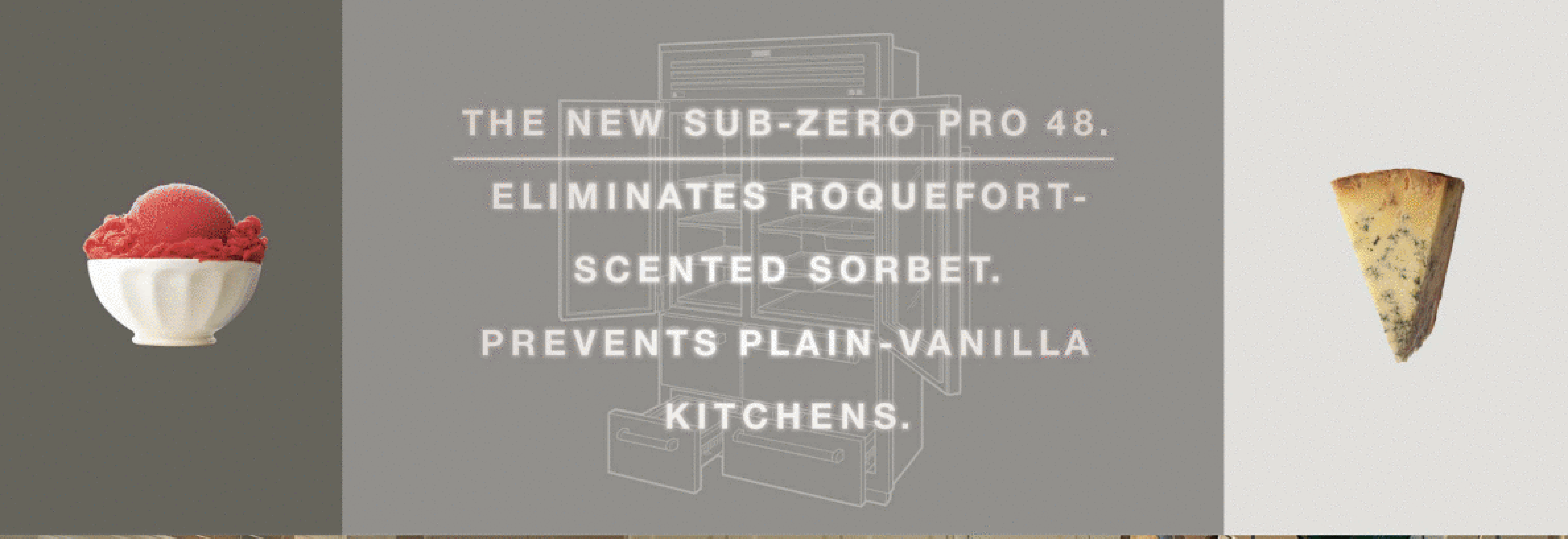

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The new farmhouse kitchen

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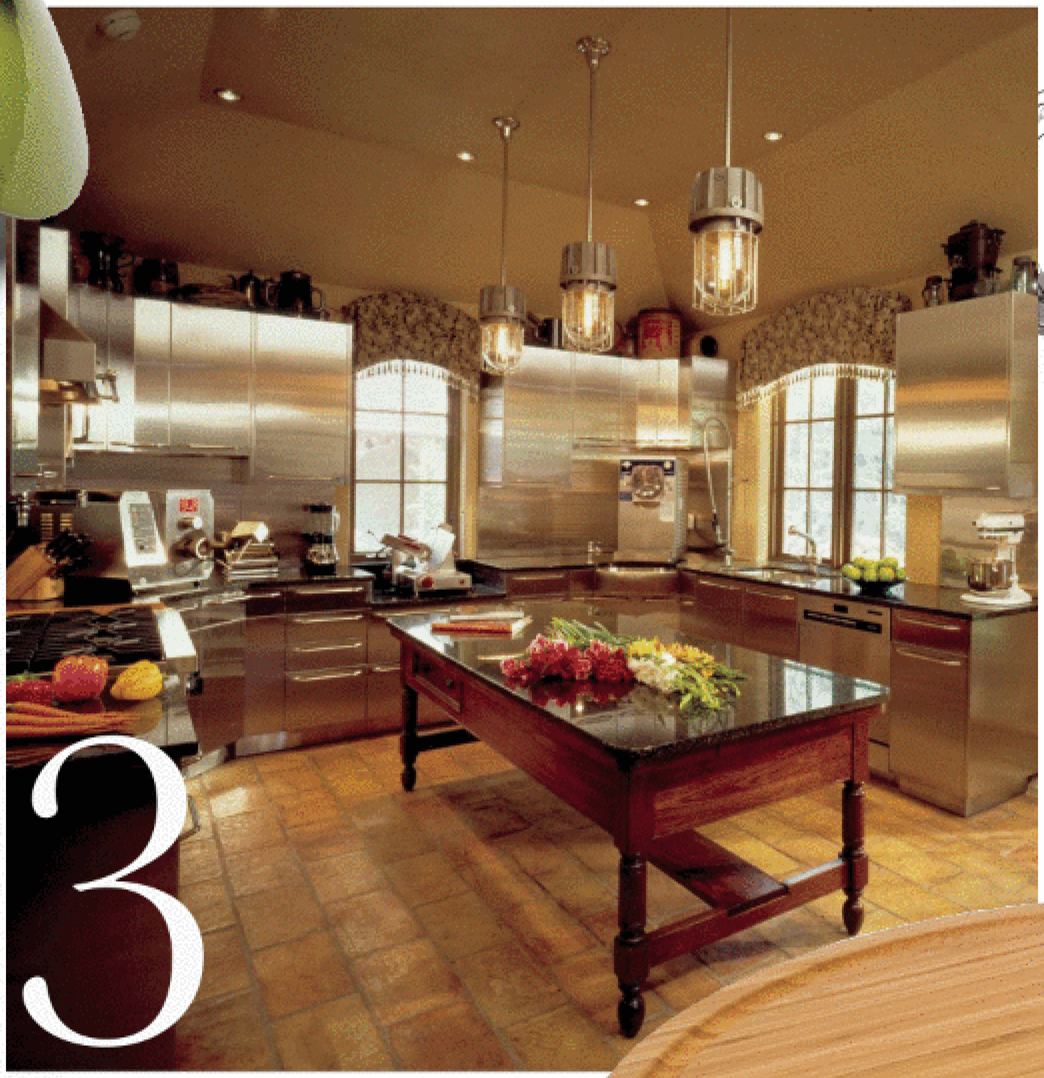
BY **ELIZABETH EDWARDS**

1

5



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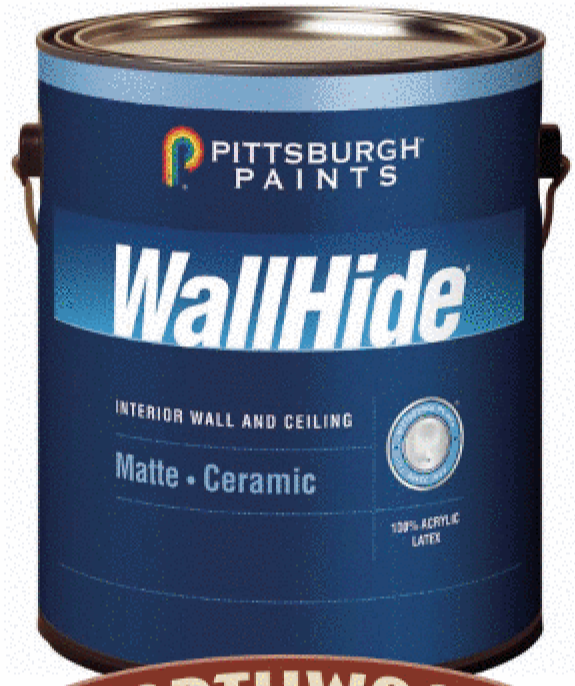

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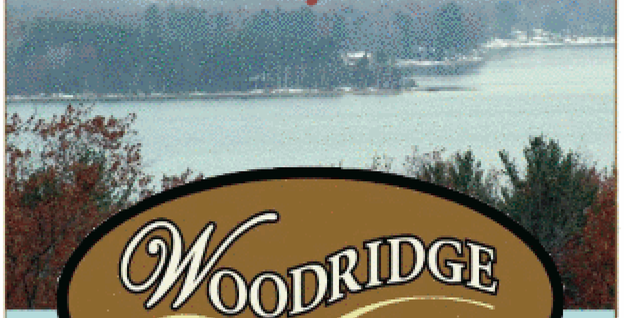

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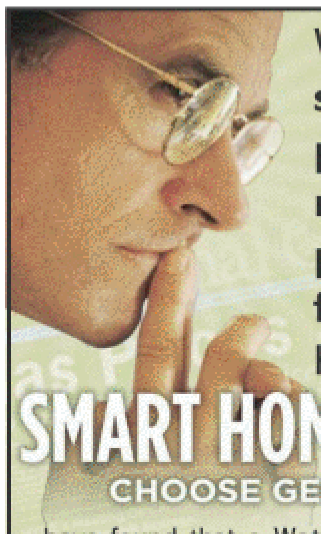

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White Space

My neighbor meditates religiously, and she nearly glows with an inner peace. When I see her I'm often hurrying down the sidewalk with a dog and a boy and a red wagon brimming with grocery bags. I'll pause, and she'll talk serenely while the retriever wraps his leather leash around my knees, and my child zips around the picket fence toward the lethal street, and the groceries tip over onto the sidewalk.

As I do damage control—hollering for my son, heeling the dog, grabbing the eggs before they hit cement—I realize I have no clue what my neighbor's saying.

"I'm sorry," I say.

She'll pause. She'll look at me consolingly.

"It's okay. You're busy."

Yes, I think, but with inner peace, I could focus on a one-minute conversation with a grownup. I'd have it all under control. I'm certain of this.

It was nirvana, just sitting there, some kind of escape from the train-wreck velocity of everyday life.

TEXT BY **LORI HALL STEELE**

Organization experts tell us to cultivate order with a simple rule: A place for everything, everything in its place. I had no place for peace. But if I built it, it would come.

The cozy alcove between two closets in my son's large playroom was a perfect spot to escape the momentum of everyday life and calm my mind, settle my soul and defrag my entire existence. I painted the walls a soothing-yet-cheerful pale yellow and hung gossamer white ceiling-to-floor sheers to seclude it from the busy world of Brio trains and Day-Glo Play-Doh. I tucked in a white futon and tossed on some white tufted pillows.

And I sat down and breathed in. It was perfectly still there, with an ethereal view of wind-tossed treetops and sun-kissed sky. It was nirvana, just sitting there, some kind of escape from the train-wreck velocity of everyday life with a preschooler, deadlines, dishes and baths. My mind cleared and muscles relaxed, and clarity descended there in that tiny, cozy space.

And so, every day after that, I put it on my to-do to spend time there cultivating inner peace. And every day after that, I didn't do it. Not once. Frustrated at my resistance to inner peace, I got an egg timer and forced myself to sit in my little Zen den for five straight minutes. As the timer ticked, the mental clutter cleared with each breath in, each breath out. My heart rate decreased. Serenity descended.

My 4-year-old son, who normally wakes up and starts pillow fighting or making fire truck–siren noises, seemed to understand the space instinctively. I walked in one morning and was startled to find him sitting behind the white sheers, silent as snow, quietly looking at the midspace of the playroom.

"Morning, sweetie. What are you doing?" I asked.

"Nothing," he said, and smiled sleepily.

And yet, despite the promise of peace, I still resisted the space. Months passed, and occasionally, while vacuuming the room or playing dominos on the floor with my son, I'd glance up at the alcove and feel a pang of guilt for being a failed meditator, a lapsed seeker of

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serenity. Finally I just gave up hope of consciously cultivating perfect inner harmony.

Then one morning the following winter, I woke to a snowstorm, the kind that can muffle an entire city and make time stand still. I shuffled around the dark house searching for coffee and, without thinking, bypassed my desk (where I usually sit down and very responsibly make a list of Things To Do). I shuffled upstairs to find a place to look at the snow and, without thinking, sat down in the alcove. I curled up and sipped my warm, new coffee and watched as a soft winter morning broke over bare-branched maples in a snow globe world.

The next morning it snowed again, and without thinking, I ended up in the same spot, idly watching morning begin. And there in the winter-white quiet, I realized that the real nature of peace was not adding something more to the to-do list. It was giving myself empty space—white space—on my calendar, in my mind and in my home. I had misunderstood my alcove, ascribing it a task instead of letting it just reveal itself.

Our homes are full of places with intentions, spaces with jobs to do. Our kitchens nourish us; our offices sustain us; our bedrooms restore us. The alcove was different. It was about nothing at all. It was an escape. It was a space without purpose.

White space gives grace to life. Designers use it to give our eyes pause. It is the empty air that differentiates heavy metal from a Chopin nocturne. It's the heartbeat before the punch line. It's the recess, the sigh, a daydream, a thing without duty. A place that's liberated from the purpose of other places. It is, perhaps, the emptiness from which all intention, all music, all motion, arises, and it's the place where it returns.

My alcove didn't have to perform miracles for me. Its miracle was just existing, without asking anything.

Lori Hall Steele is a frequent contributor to Northern Home & Cottage.

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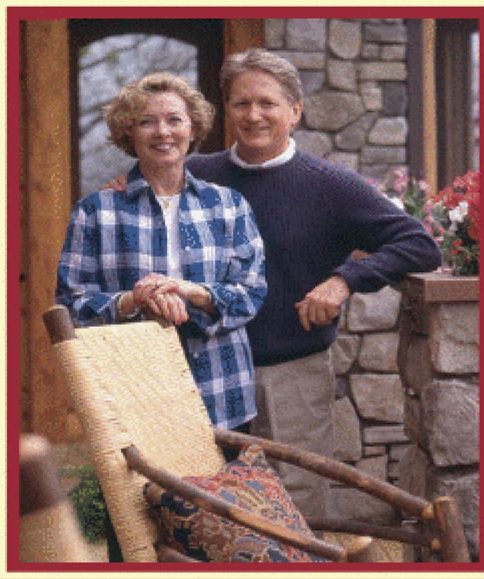

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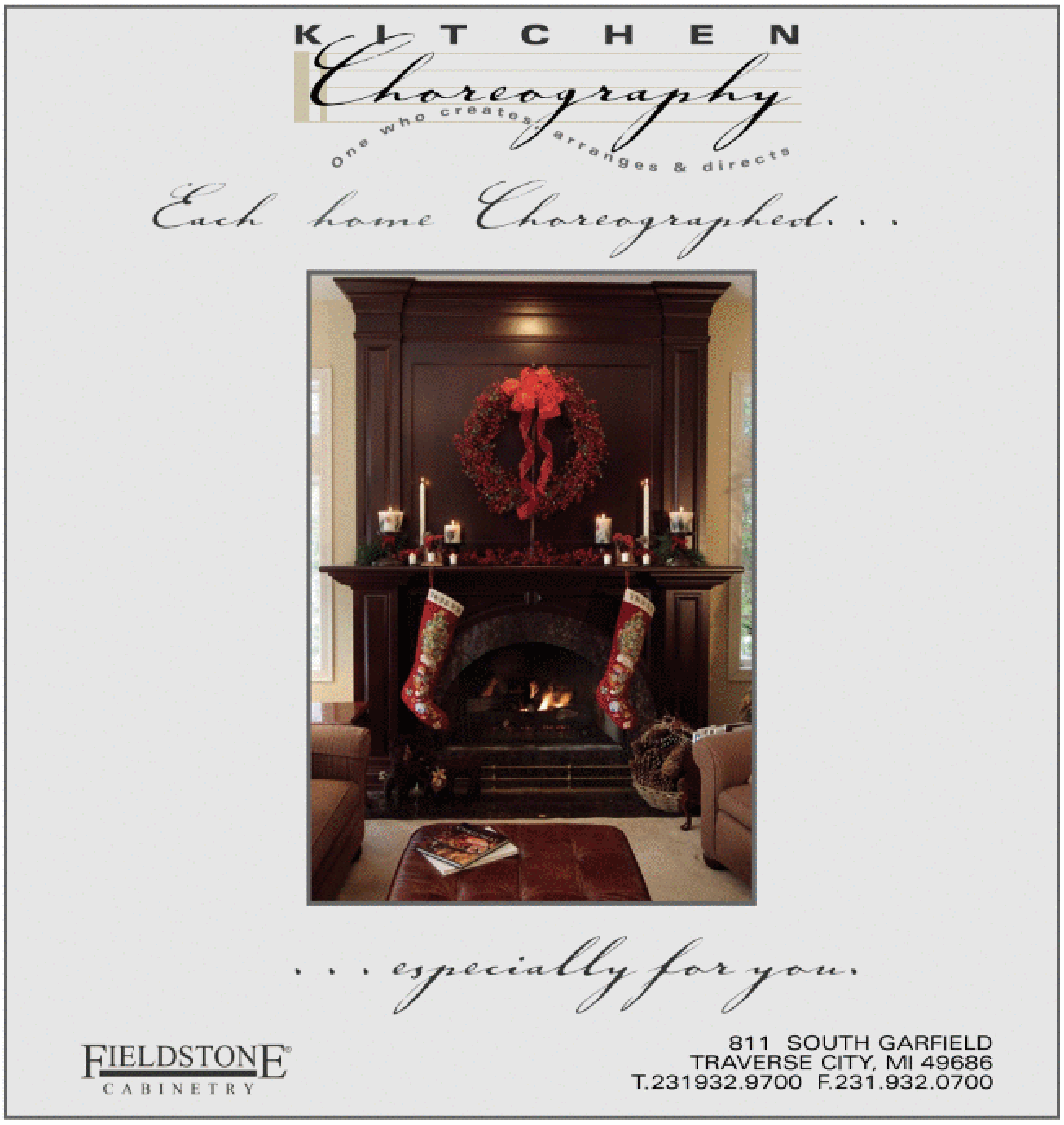

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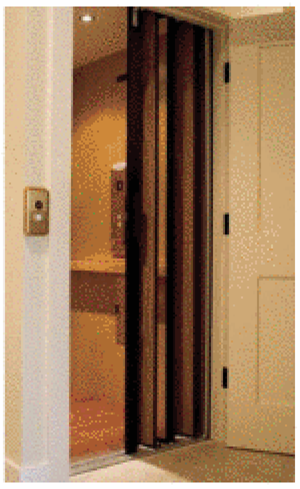

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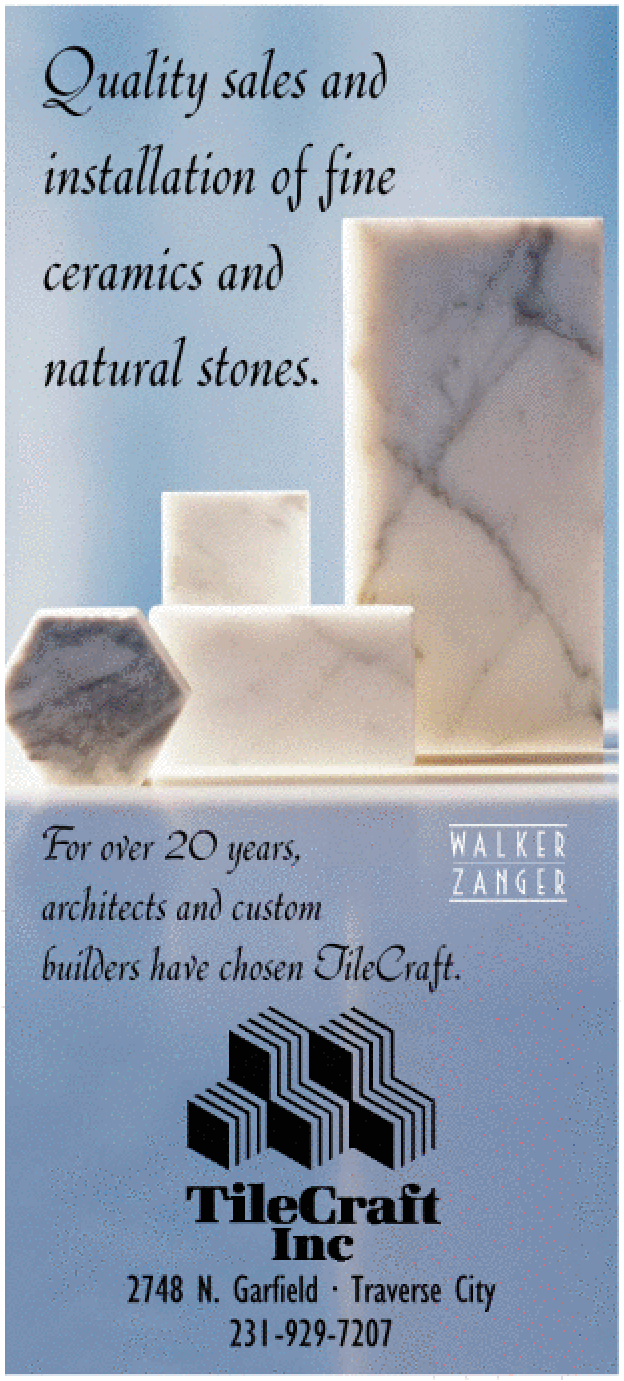

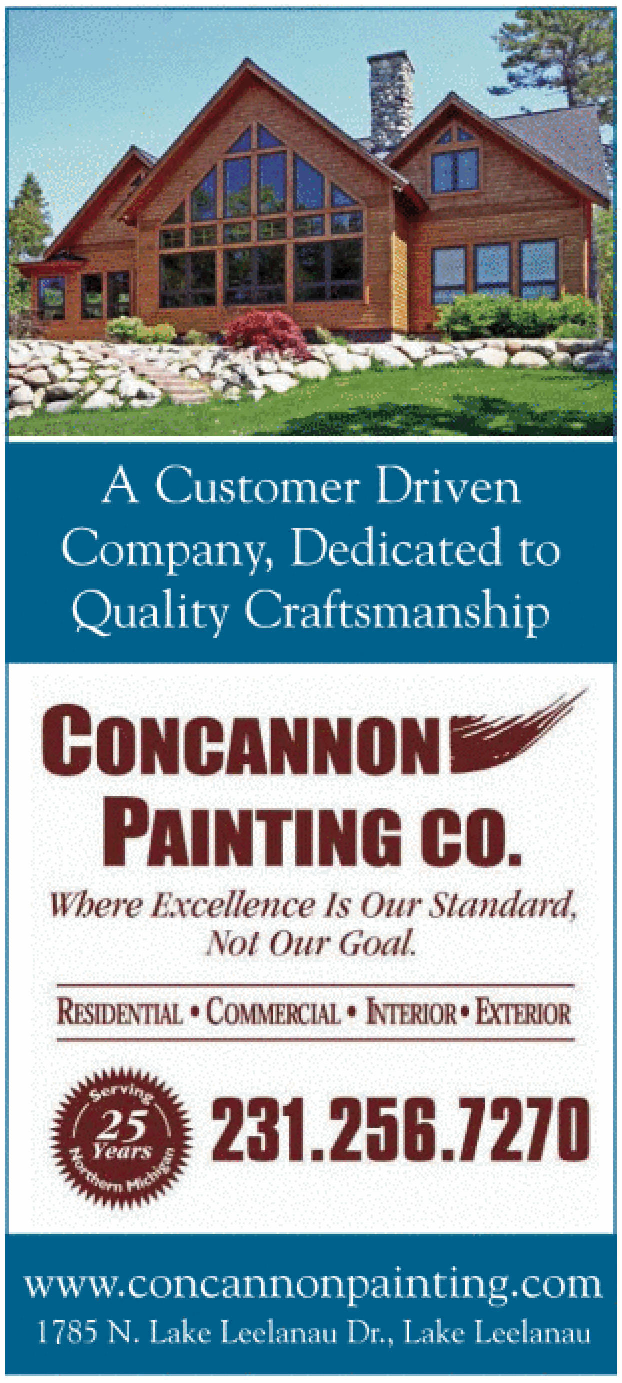

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